

# MICHIGAN AVENUE BRIDGE AND WACKER DRIVE ESPLANADE

*Michigan Avenue at the Chicago River and  
the South Bank of the Chicago River between  
Michigan and Wabash avenues  
Chicago, Illinois*

*PRELIMINARY STAFF SUMMARY OF INFORMATION*

*Submitted to the  
Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks  
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## MICHIGAN AVENUE BRIDGE AND WACKER DRIVE ESPLANADE

Michigan Avenue at the Chicago River and the South Bank of the Chicago River between Michigan and Wabash Avenues

Michigan Avenue Bridge and its four bridge houses: Edward H. Bennett, architect; Thomas Pihlfeldt, engineer of bridges; Hugh Young, engineer of bridge design; constructed 1918-20; commemorative sculptures by Henry Hering and J. E. Fraser, completed 1928.

Wacker Drive Esplanade: Edward H. Bennett, architect; Hugh Young, engineer; constructed 1924-26.

Inspired by the monumental architecture of European capitals, the Michigan Avenue Bridge and adjoining Wacker Drive Esplanade are structures whose architecture suggests the historical prominence associated with their location as well as the pivotal role the bridge has played in the development of the city. Encompassing the sites of Fort Dearborn on the south bank of the Chicago River and the homesteads of DuSable and Kinzie on the north, the bridge environs are steeped in the early settlement history of the city. Indeed, the classical architecture of the bridge abutments and towers and river-level promenade focus attention on the waterway that was a principal factor in the city's settlement and which nurtured its early commercial and industrial development.

With its dedication in 1920, the bridge itself opened a new era of growth as it facilitated access between the Near North Side and the Loop. The linkage was a vital component of the *Plan of Chicago* (1909), the city's first comprehensive planning document and one which is internationally recognized for its contribution to early city planning efforts. The bridge and esplanade were among the few elements of the plan to be realized, and stylistically they embody the vision of the plan's authors, Daniel Burnham and Edward Bennett. Serving as consulting architect to the Chicago Plan Commission, the city agency empowered to review and implement aspects of the plan, Bennett carried out the bridge and esplanade designs in a manner consistent with the neo-Baroque quality of the plan's renderings. The limestone cladding and Beaux-Arts detailing of the bridge structures and esplanade established an architectural theme that architects of subsequent North Michigan Avenue buildings incorporated into their designs.

Technically and artistically, the Michigan Avenue Bridge was the culminating achievement of efforts throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to span the

Chicago River. Bennett's refined Beaux-Arts design complemented the engineering feat and provided this important junction with a triumphal gateway for both land and water.

### *Early Chicago Bridge Types*

Historically, the Chicago River has been the lifeblood of the city's commercial and industrial development, but throughout the nineteenth century it was also a major impediment to the growth of other urban sectors, especially residential settlement of neighborhoods separated from the downtown area by the river and its branches. As the most economical, and therefore the principal means of transportation for goods and people, waterways were as congested during the nineteenth century as the busiest city streets. In the context of a growing city, conflicts between marine and land traffic were inevitable. The historical preeminence of marine right-of-way versus land benefitted the former but only at the expense of intracity development.

Early efforts were made to minimize the congestion between land and water traffic through such assuasive measures as requiring hinged smokestacks on barges or limiting bridge openings to ten minutes. However, the primary means for ameliorating the conflicts was in the development of movable bridges. The earliest of these structures in Chicago were swing bridges centered on masonry piers in the middle of the river channel. The type was used almost exclusively in Chicago prior to 1900, but inherent drawbacks in their design - - susceptibility to damage of the central pier from errant ships, slow and cumbersome mechanisms, and diminishment of the channel width due to the central location of the stationary support - - made engineers realize the obsolescence of the type by the 1890s.

During that decade, local engineers initiated studies of bascule bridge technology. This bridge type, the name of which was derived from the French word for "rocker" or "see-saw," operates in a fashion similar to medieval drawbridges. It has either a single or double-leaf roadway which opens vertically by rocking back on a horizontal axis. The newer type had distinct advantages over swing bridge technology. Its mechanism was more efficient, allowing it to operate quickly. Also, because its foundations were on either side of the river, rather than in the middle, ships were able to navigate a clear channel. Most important in terms of ground transportation, bascule bridge design allowed the construction of bridges for adjacent parallel streets. The horizontal movement of swing bridges had precluded building bridges too close together because of the potential collision of spans when opened. This new technology, then, enabled the construction of more bridges, relieving congestion for both ground and water traffic and promoting intracity development.

The rolling lift bridge is a variation on the bascule concept that was developed locally by William Scherzer. Bridges of this type, the first of which was put in service in 1894 at Van Buren Street for the Metropolitan West Side Elevated Railroad, operate on cylindrical bases that roll back on flat tracks underneath the structure at the river level. The Cermak Road Bridge (1906) is the only example of the type still in use here. Although

the design was a major improvement on swing bridges, it too had shortcomings. In an article on bascule bridges published in *A Half Century of Chicago Building* (1910), bridge engineer J. B. Strauss observed: "The rolling contact bridges have given evidence of elemental weakness in the tracks and threads which in two or three structures have resulted in fracture, throwing grave doubt upon the suitability of the rolling contact principle for such usage." In addition to their structural problems, the extensive foundations for the bridges and the trackage upon which they operated were built well out into the river channel, significantly diminishing its width and limiting shipping access.

In 1899, city engineers led by John Ericson surveyed movable bridges in the United States and Europe to study those features that could improve local bridge design. Comparing four types--swing, vertical lift, rolling lift, and trunnion bascule -- the group decided the latter was the most efficacious for the needs of the city. The trunnion bascule had been developed in Europe over the previous half century. In contrast to the rolling lift, which required extensive tracks to accommodate the horizontal and rotational lift, the trunnion bascule employed a fixed horizontal trunnion, or axle, minimizing the projection of bridge abutments into the waterway and providing more efficient bridge operation. Ericson and his colleagues refined the trunnion bascule technology for Chicago and introduced it with their 1902 design for the bridge at Cortland Street (originally Clybourn Place). Restored in 1982 by the Department of Public Works, the bridge has been cited by the American Society of Civil Engineers as a National Historic Civil Engineering Landmark.

Although introduced in Europe, the trunnion bascule bridge has become a type identified with Chicago due to the number of them built here and because of the refinements developed by local engineers. The Cortland Street bridge is the prototype for almost every subsequent movable span built in the city. A single drawback of its design, however, was the overhead through trusses and portal bracing which diminished its esthetic qualities and, more importantly, obscured the operators' view of the roadway. With the development by Alexander Van Babo in 1911 of the internal rack -- the below-deck rocker arm that engages the gears -- the need for through trusses and additional superstructure was eliminated.

The first decade of the twentieth century was dominated by the technological advances in bridge design. But engineering improvements such as Von Babo's also made possible corresponding improvements in the artistic qualities of bridges, and after 1910 a new era in local bridge design was initiated, focusing on their esthetic development. The character of subsequent individual bridge designs, as well as that of a broader city planning scheme in which the bridges themselves played an integral role, was heavily influenced by an architectural style of eclectic classicism as it was taught at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris.

### *Beaux-Arts Classicism in Architecture and Urban Planning*

Few institutions have had as significant an effect on American architecture as did the Ecole des Beaux-Arts during the second half of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth. The Paris school of architecture either provided or influenced the training of American architects for three generations beginning in the 1840s. Until this country's first architecture school was established in 1865, Americans seeking academic training in the field traveled to Paris to study at the Ecole. When the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Columbia University established the first two schools of architecture in the United States, both employed the teaching methods of the Ecole and imported instructors from that institution. As a result, Beaux-Arts principles persisted in American architecture into the 1920s.

In plan, Beaux-Arts buildings stressed formality and logic; spaces were arranged hierarchically along major and minor axes according to function. Beaux-Arts facades were generally monumental and borrowed liberally from historical, specifically classical, precedent. The goal was to produce structures of monumental grandeur, buildings that both delighted the eye and conveyed an image of rational order.

The Beaux-Art emphasis on rational order found expression in early twentieth-century American city planning. The rapid growth of urban America during the nineteenth century had created cities that were crowded, congested, and frequently chaotic. Toward the end of the century, social concerns and aesthetic considerations prompted a movement to bring order to America's cities. In Chicago, the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 demonstrated how Beaux-Arts principles could be applied on a large scale to create a handsomely ordered urban environment. The "White City," as the fair grounds were popularly called, provided impetus and support for urban planning in the United States and inaugurated the "City Beautiful" movement. One of the major forces in this movement was Chicagoan Daniel Hudson Burnham. As one of Chicago's most prominent architects, Burnham was in 1890 appointed chief of construction of the Columbian Exposition. His experience supervising the design of the fair led him to devote much of the remainder of his career to city planning. In 1901, Burnham worked on a plan for the improvement of Washington, D.C., reviving and expanding Pierre L'Enfant's original plan of 1791. This was followed in 1903 by a plan for a civic center for Cleveland, Ohio, and in 1905 by plans for San Francisco, California, and for several cities in the Philippines.

In 1906, Burnham was commissioned by the Commercial Club to develop a plan for Chicago. For the next three years, Burnham and his assistant Edward H. Bennett worked on a plan for transform Chicago into a Beaux-Arts city. The *Plan of Chicago* was published in 1909 and "caused a sensation," according to Burnham. The plan called for the transformation of the lakefront into a premier recreational area consisting of twenty-three miles of beaches, parks, piers, harbors, and lagoons; the development of the city's parks into an expanded and unified park system; the treatment of the banks of the Chicago River in a formal manner with public promenades along the riverfront; the creation of cultural and civic centers in the central area; the improvement of the city's street and boule-

ward system; the construction of a network of highways linking Chicago with its suburbs to unify the metropolitan region; and the consolidation of the city's rail terminals to reduce congestion in the central area. Burnham believed that the city's central area would expand to the west, and the plan postulated the development of Congress Street as the city's major east-west axis, the one "destined to carry the heaviest movement of any street in the world."

The Chicago Plan called for widening Michigan Avenue between Randolph Street and Chicago Avenue and for raising it between Randolph and Grand to create a lower level that would accommodate commercial traffic. At the river, a double-decked bridge, the upper level for pedestrian and light vehicle traffic and the lower for heavy commercial traffic, was proposed to replace the outdated and overcrowded Rush Street Bridge which was then the primary river crossing. The broad concept of Burnham's Chicago Plan was never realized; among the individual elements of the plan that were implemented were the improvement of Michigan Avenue and the construction of the Michigan Avenue Bridge.

#### *The Realization of the Plan of Chicago: the Michigan Avenue Bridge and Additional Improvements*

The plan and its broad esthetic concepts were major influences on what historian Joan Draper (*Chicago Bridges*, City of Chicago Department of Public Works, 1984) has referred to as the second generation of Chicago bascule bridge design, beginning around 1909. Another factor affecting the city's bridge building program was the federal government's mandate for the removal of swing bridges in favor of designs whose abutments and mechanisms were less intrusive to the river channel. Two years later, in 1911, a bond issue was passed allowing the City to comply with that order.

Local initiatives reinforced the orders of the federal government. The Harbor Commission, an agency formed during the administration of Mayor Fred Busse to oversee waterway improvements, recommended the construction of bridges with a clear span of 200 feet at the water line rather than the 140-foot standard theretofore used. In addition, Mayor Busse established the Chicago Plan Commission to review and implement elements of the *Plan of Chicago*. (The plan itself, having been privately commissioned and financed, was not a product of any public planning effort by the city government.) In 1910, the commission hired Edward Bennett as its architectural consultant, thus assuring consistency between the plan's concepts and their realization.

The contributions of Edward Herbert Bennett (1874-1954) to early twentieth century city planning are largely overshadowed by Daniel Burnham's legendary status as architect and urban planner, but during his career Bennett was the author of numerous planning documents for cities throughout the nation. Bennett was born in England and came to the United States, to San Francisco, around 1890. He received his degree in architecture from the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in 1901, returning to the United States the following year to work for New York architect George Post. Exceptionally adept at drafting, Ben-

nett was "loaned" by Post to Daniel Burnham's office when Burnham was in need of a skilled draftsman to sketch ideas he was developing for a competition for new building at the United States Military Academy at West Point. Bennett returned to New York after the competition but stayed only briefly, having decided to accept Burnham's invitation to join his company. With his Beaux-Arts training Bennett provided exceptional academic credentials to the firm, and as commissions came in to the office for commercial and civic structures Burnham drew on his young associate's training.

Bennett's work with Burnham on city plans for San Francisco (1905) and Chicago (1909) broadened the younger architect's expertise. His urban planning experience and his position as consulting architect for the Chicago Plan Commission established a national prominence for Bennett which he furthered in plans for numerous cities including Portland (1912), Brooklyn (1914), San Francisco (1915), and Minneapolis (1917). In his architectural work Bennett never varied from his classical background, whether used academically as in Buckingham Fountain (1923-27) in Grant Park - - patterned after the Latona Fountain at Versailles - - or more abstractly in the "stripped classical" style of the Federal Building (1929-33) at the Chicago Century of Progress Exposition.

In his role as consulting architect to the Plan Commission, Bennett worked with engineers John Ericson, Thomas Pihlfeldt, and Hugh Young to develop standard bridge designs that incorporated engineering features and architectural detailing that would enhance the visual character of these structures in a manner consistent with the City Beautiful movement. Using precedents such as the Pont de la Concorde and the Alexander III Bridge, both in Paris, Bennett adapted their classical styling to bridge technology as it was evolving here. The Washington Street Bridge (1913) was the first of the new trunnion bascule bridges based on these technical and artistic influences. According to Joan Draper, "Bennett effected the appropriation of \$14,000 to cover the steel frame operator houses with decorative sheet-copper stamped moldings and an ornamental lead roof." The architecture itself was executed in a neo-Baroque style in the manner of French prototypes. Obviously, Bennett realized that such materials and ornate detailing were essential to upgrading the visual impact of the bridge structures and to make them more harmonious with surrounding architecture.

While a number of downtown bridges provided linkages between the Loop and other sectors, the need for a major connection between the North and South sides near the mouth of the Chicago River had long been urged. Downtown traffic circulation was especially bad on the south bank of the river due to the presence of the South Water Street Market, various docks and warehouses, and the railheads of the Illinois Central, Michigan Central, and Wisconsin Central railroads. The Rush Street swing bridge was estimated to have been handling 50% of all north-south traffic in the central area; however, its efficiency was seriously compromised by its dated technology. A top priority of the Plan Commission was to relieve the bottleneck brought about in large part by the Rush Street Bridge operation.

Because Michigan Avenue was already a major South Side thoroughfare, it was deem-

ed the most propitious street for development as the major north-south link. Although its broad street width offered a major advantage for further development, the roadway and its northward continuation did present some problems. South of the river traffic flow on Michigan Avenue was constricted due to the narrowing of the street between Randolph Street and the river. To the north, the street to which Michigan Avenue would be linked, Pine Street, was still a low-density avenue of run-down single-family homes, some of which had been converted into rooming houses. Warehouses and light industrial buildings added to the squalid atmosphere of the street. A program for street widening was undertaken in conjunction with work on the new bridge.

Planning for the bridge began in 1910. From its inception the span was developed as a bascule bridge incorporating an internal rack to eliminate any overhead superstructure. In a 1913 revision of the preliminary design, a two-level roadway scheme was introduced to separate the heavy flow of private automobile traffic from the local freight traffic along South Water Street. In addition, federal regulations stipulated a 16-foot clearance underneath bridge arches; therefore, plans also specified raising the grade of the bridge approaches to accommodate the double-deck configuration as well as the extensive below-deck supports.

According to Bennett's own account (in "The Chicago River Bridges," *Architectural Record*, December, 1922), technical aspects of the design were approved by bridge engineers at an early date, leaving its mechanical detailing to the staffs of the Department of Public Works bridge department and the architect. The engineering work was carried out under the supervision of Thomas Pihlfeldt, engineer of bridges, and Hugh Young, engineer in charge of the Michigan Avenue Bridge project. In contrast to the expeditious handling of the engineering, the architecture of the approaches, abutments, lighting standards, and bridge houses underwent revision until construction began.

The bridge development being carried out in unison with the upgrading of Michigan Avenue, work on the span itself was delayed by property owners fighting condemnation procedures and by disputes between the South Parks and Lincoln Park commissions which administered matters related to the boulevards on their respective sides of the river. Circumstances related to World War I also hindered construction. In 1916, work was begun on the widening and raising of the street north of Randolph, and two years later construction of the bridge itself started.

The bridge was opened on May 14, 1920. Its dedication marked the fruition of Chicago's "dream of 30 years," as noted by one official. It was the first double-decked trunnion-bascule bridge in the world built for two highways; other bridges combined rail and auto usage. It was also the first split-span bridge, being essentially two parallel bridges originally connected with diaphragms (but now held together by a clutch system) so that the east or west half of the bridge can be raised for repairs while the other half continues to function.

The Chicago Plan treated the bridge at Michigan Avenue as a monumental link between the North and South sides, and Bennett's design for the bridge houses and approach-



es realized that monumentality. Permanent bridge houses were completed in 1922; the structures had been temporarily sheathed in wood from the time of the bridge dedication. Their overall architecture based on French classicism, the bridge houses are clad in Bedford stone and treated as a classical pylon. The rusticated bases and the abutments below street level reinforce the classical character.

The monumentality of the bridge architecture is emphasized with the addition of commemorative sculptures to the bridge tenders' houses. The sculptures were indicated in Bennett's drawings prior to the completion of the bridge, but they were not set into place until 1928. Tableaus illustrating major events and personalities in the city's history are modeled after French precedents, specifically the Arc de Triomphe. The sculptural compositions and the identity of allegorical figures are direct references from the French landmark, and their use at this pivotal urban node is keeping with the triumphal entry theme borrowed from their Parisian counterpart.

The sculptures on the southern pylons, by sculptor Henry Hering, were paid for by the B. F. Ferguson Fund which had been established by the estate of a wealthy Chicago lumber dealer to provide public sculpture for the city. Hering is known for several major commissions related to Chicago buildings: the classical figures on the Field Museum of Natural History, a pediment for the Civic Opera House, and for the allegorical figures at the Union Station. The relief on the southwest corner of the Michigan Avenue Bridge is called "Defense" and depicts the Fort Dearborn Massacre of 1812. The pylon at the southeast corner is entitled "Regeneration" and represents Chicagoans' efforts to rebuild the city after the fire of 1871.

William Wrigley, Jr. donated the sculptures on the northern side of the bridge which were sculpted by James Earle Fraser. The artist was born in Minnesota but grew up in Chicago and worked for Richard Bock, the sculptor who crafted figures for several of Frank Lloyd Wright's buildings. Fraser is well known for two works: that of an exhausted Indian slumped on his tired horse, entitled "The End of the Trail" (1894), and his design for the buffalo nickel which was first minted in 1913. "The Pioneers" on the northwest bridge house portrays Chicago's frontier history in the person of fur-trapper John Kinzie, who in 1803 bought for his home the tract of land just east of the current bridge property which had been settled by Jean Baptiste Pointe du Sable around 1779. The legacy of 17th-century French exploration of this area is depicted in "The Discoverers" on the northeast corner of the bridge. It honors Marquette and Joliet, who in 1673 became the first Europeans to pass through the Chicago River, and LaSalle and Tonti, who traveled the river in 1681.

Regarding this last grouping, the authors of *Chicago's Public Sculpture* (Ira J. Bach and Mary Lackritz Gray, 1983) make two anecdotal observations: that Marquette, who was a Jesuit priest, is sculpted in the robes of the Franciscan order, and that the profile of the kneeling Indian resembles that of the Indian on the obverse of the buffalo nickel. The addition of the sculptures was hailed at the time as "the first step in making this gateway as famous as the Place de la Concorde in Paris." More accurately, the reliefs sustain-

ed a movement to make Michigan Avenue a boulevard to rival those of the French capital.

The completion of the bridge was another benchmark, after the widening of Michigan Avenue between Randolph Street and the river, in the comprehensive Michigan Avenue/riverfront improvements program. In 1920, the west side of Pine Street, north of the river to Oak Street, was demolished for the widening of Michigan Avenue as it was extended northward. That project took another two years to complete. Commercial real estate development was spurred by these public initiatives, and in 1919 William Wrigley's chewing gum company became the first to build a prestigious office tower on what was eventually renamed North Michigan Avenue.

Across the river from Wrigley's edifice, completed in 1921, the dilapidated buildings and congested character of the South Water Street wholesale market were in marked contrast to the central area beautification and arterial improvements campaigns that were under way. Burnham and Bennett's city plan had conceived of an upgraded South Water Street - - along with Michigan Avenue, 12th Street (Roosevelt Road), and Canal Street - - as an avenue to facilitate access to downtown by motor vehicles. The South Water Street improvement scheme called for a bilevel street for freight vehicles below and automobile traffic on the upper level.

As was the case with the Michigan Avenue Bridge, the Chicago Plan Commission was the driving force in implementing the idea. Planning was begun in 1917 and supervised by Hugh Young and Edward Bennett; however, work was delayed until 1924. Legal proceedings related to private property condemnation and compensation postponed demolition, and property settlements totalled half of the \$21.6 million project costs. Engineering factors were also considerable. Soil conditions and pressure from the river complicated the design development as did the demolition that took place as caissons for the new avenue were being sunk. Streetcar and elevated railway transportation continued unabated during the roadway construction.

The new street, stretching westward along the south bank of the river between Michigan Avenue and the junction of the south channel of the river at Lake Street, was opened in 1926. The bilevel thoroughfare was named Wacker Drive in honor of Charles Wacker who, as head of the Chicago Plan Commission, was one of the principal officials responsible for implementing portions of the 1909 Chicago Plan. The roadway is constructed of reinforced concrete throughout, the upper road surface supported by octagonal columns. Two components of the design originally planned, a railway line and a mechanical ventilation system, were never executed.

In terms of architectural design, Wacker Drive furthered the ideals of the City Beautiful movement. As noted by Joan Draper, the "Wacker Drive project was far more than a technical feat. Its exterior surfaces present an image evocative of the Seine River banks in Paris, the Thames in London, and the Danube in Vienna." The smoothly rusticated masonry of the riverfront walls, along with the classical balustrade lining the riverfront

elevation of the upper deck, the wide ceremonial staircases between the street and dock levels, and the obelisk lamp posts simulate classical French architecture. Although plans for a matching promenade along the north bank of the river were never implemented, the distinctive architectural treatment of the current Wacker Drive make it a substantial river-front enhancement.

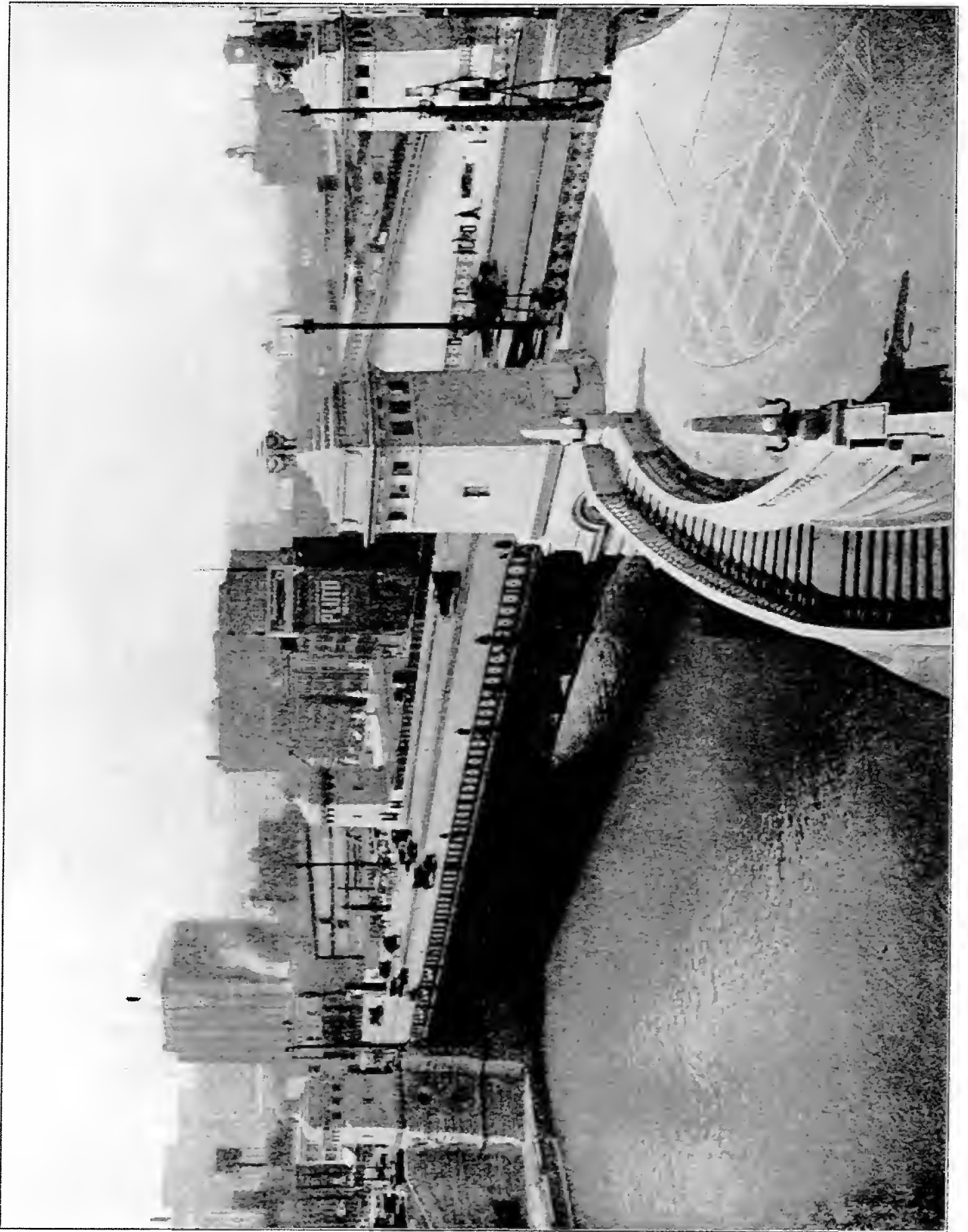
By 1930, the area around Michigan Avenue and the river had undergone a complete transformation. The river-edge improvement, the creation of North Michigan Avenue, and the bridge linking the North and South sides provided a dynamic backdrop for substantial private investment which showed itself in the form of high-class commercial architecture. Nowhere is this seen more emphatically than at the Michigan Avenue Bridge itself, bordered as it is by the Wrigley Building and Tribune Tower on the north, the London Guarantee on the southwest, and the 333 North Michigan Avenue Building at the southeast. The varying styles of these structures illustrate the transformation that skyscraper design underwent during the 1920s. The river, the bridge, and the broad boulevard provide an ample foreground that allows the distinctive silhouette of each of the four buildings to be seen to maximum advantage, creating one of Chicago's finest urban spaces.



*OPPOSITE:*

Opened in 1920, the Michigan Avenue Bridge was a major element in a comprehensive public improvements program conceived to promote intracity development by linking the Loop and North Side. The concept was introduced in the *Plan of Chicago*, written by Daniel Burnham and Edward Bennett, published in 1909. Within a decade of the completion of the bridge, areas adjacent to it were transformed from primarily light industrial and warehouse usage to a district of first-class office and commercial structures.

*(The Architectural Record, December, 1922)*



*OPPOSITE:*

The construction of the bridge took two years. The advanced technology and wide roadway of the new bridge supplanted the Rush Street Bridge, seen in the background, as the major link between the Loop and the North Side.

*(Photograph courtesy Department of Public Works)*

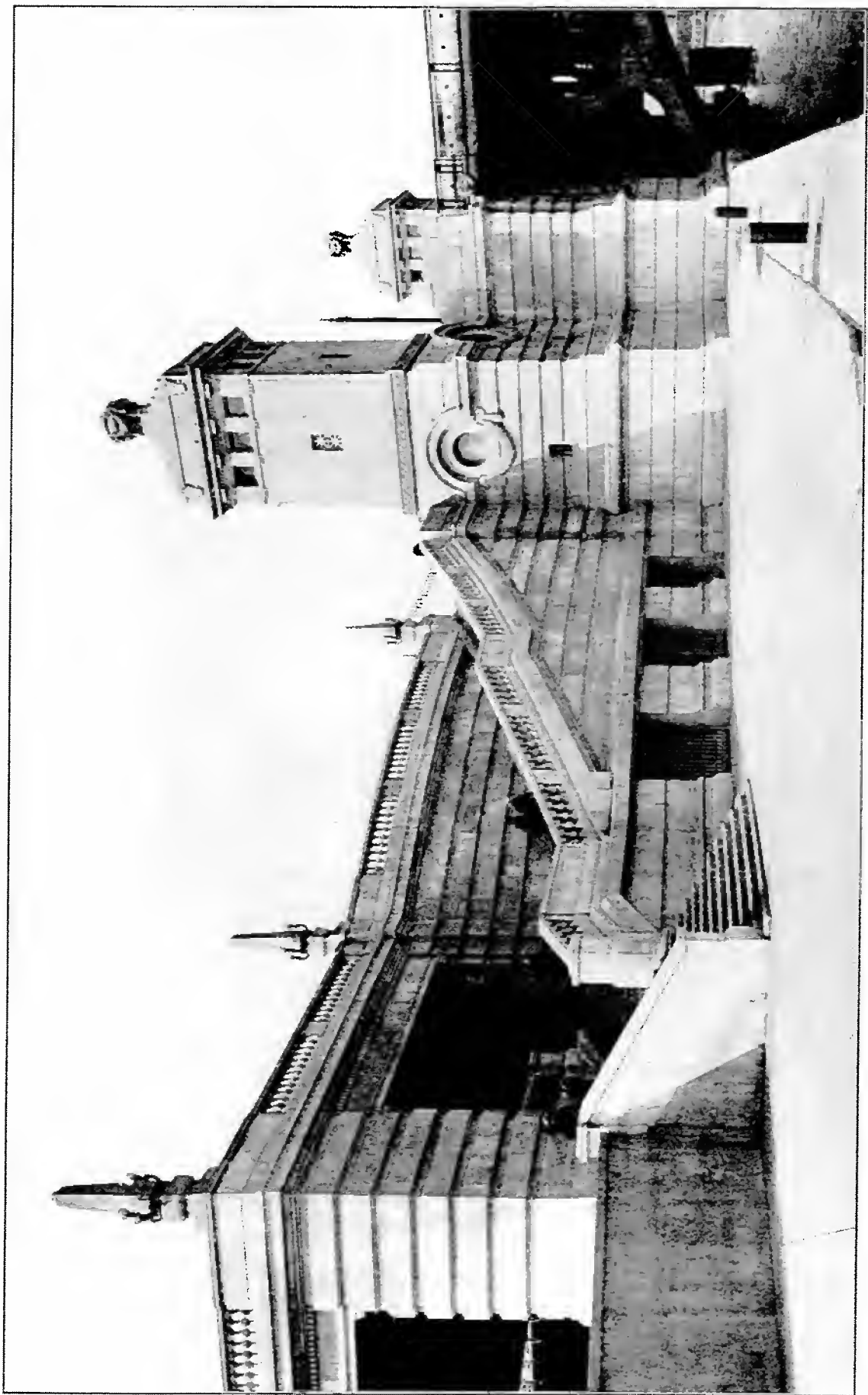




*OPPOSITE:*

The walls of the river-level abutments have a smooth banded rustification, reinforcing the classical character of the bridge houses. The southeast terrace, illustrated here, and the one on the northeast have been destroyed, leaving only the two docks on the west extant.

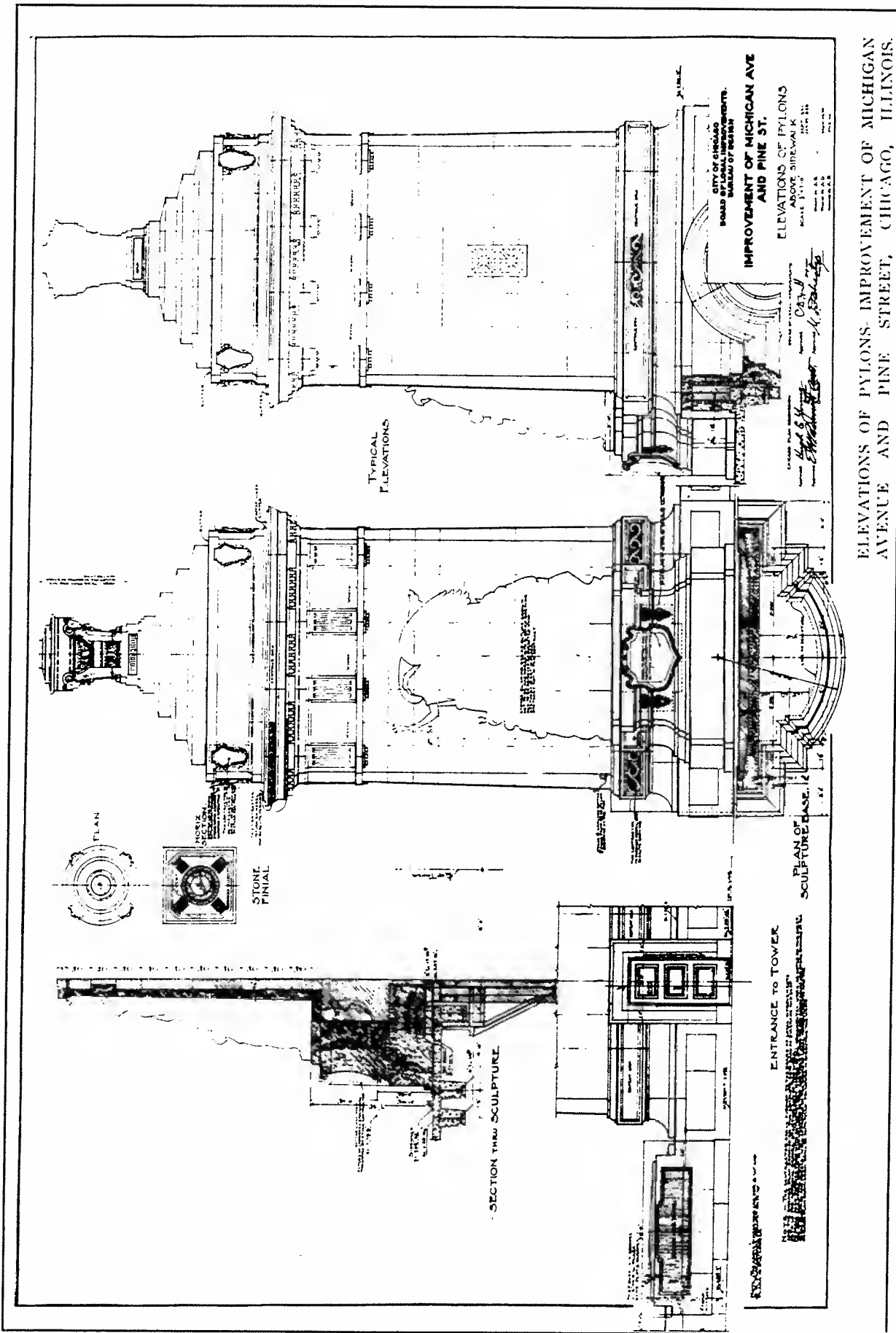
*(The Architectural Record, December, 1922)*



*OPPOSITE:*

Sculptural groupings for each of the bridge houses were planned from the beginning, though the monuments were not installed until 1928, six years after the completion of the structures.

*(The Architectural Record, December, 1922)*



ELEVATIONS OF PYLONS-IMPROVEMENT OF MICHIGAN AVENUE AND PINE STREET, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS.

*OPPOSITE:*

The Beaux-Arts classical styling of the bridge houses is enhanced by monumental sculptural groupings depicting scenes from Chicago history. The tableau on the northeast tower depicts the legacy of seventeenth-century French exploration of this area - - specifically Marquette and Joliet, who in 1673 became the first Europeans to pass through the Chicago River, and LaSalle and Tonti, who traveled the river in 1681.

*(Steve Beal, Photographer)*



*OPPOSITE:*

The construction of Wacker Drive was a significant improvement for downtown traffic circulation as well as the character of the riverfront. Its architectural treatment, featuring banded rustication and stone obelisk light standards, is reminiscent of the classical treatment of riveredge improvements in Europe.

*(Photograph courtesy Department of Public Works)*



Seelye-Walker Sk. Impt.  
Face along river front  
Feb. 24, 1927  
Cont. 18-7



*The Commission on Chicago Landmarks was established in 1968 by city ordinance, and was given the responsibility of recommending to the City Council that specific landmarks be preserved and protected by law. The ordinance states that the Commission, whose nine members are appointed by the Mayor, can recommend any area, building, structure, work of art, or other object that has sufficient historical, community, or aesthetic value. Once the City Council acts on the Commission's recommendation and designates a Chicago Landmark, the ordinance provides for the preservation, protection, enhancement, rehabilitation, and perpetuation of that landmark. The Commission assists by carefully reviewing all applications for building permits pertaining to the designated Chicago Landmarks. This insures that any proposed alteration does not detract from the qualities that caused the landmark to be designated.*

*The Commission makes its recommendations to the City Council only after extensive study. This preliminary summary of information has been prepared by the Commission staff and was submitted to the Commission when it initiated consideration of the historical and architectural qualities of this potential landmark.*



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